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ABSTRACT

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting participated in the 1993 Yankelovich Youth Monitor in order to determine information about kids and television viewing in 1990s. The Youth Monitor is a study of 1,200 children ages 6-17 conducted with an in-home interview in randomly selected households throughout the United States. The study asks kids a wide range of questions about their lives at home and at school. This report looks at the impact of television on kids; kids' viewing habits; what kids watch; kids and public television viewing and attitudes; and kids, parents, and violence on television. Television impacts American children significantly. Television is in kids' homes, often in the their own rooms, and is viewed an average of approximately 22 hours per week. Television is also in the schools, used to enhance learning. Television is kids' number one source of information on news and current events, and a prominent source of information for consumer items and music trends. Although public television has captured the preschool age group with high quality educational programming, older children spend more of their viewing time with other networks. (Author/SWC)

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No. 64, November 1993

Kids and Television in the Nineties

Responses from the Youth Monitor

Public television has served children with quality children's television programs for more than two decades. What do we know about kids and television viewing in the Nineties? How much television do they watch? How important is it in their lives? How much TV viewing is *too much?* Do kids think TV is too violent? And, after all those preschool years of viewing *Sesame Street* and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, what do they think of public television?

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting participated in the 1993 Yankelovich Youth Monitor in order to answer some of these questions about children in the Nineties. The Youth Monitor is a study of 1,200 children ages 6-17 conducted with an in-home interview in randomly selected households throughout the United States.[1] The study asks kids a wide range of questions about their lives at home and at school. Not surprisingly, television figures prominently.

Television impacts all kids

The impact and usage of television spans entertainment, a source of information, a method of learning in school, and a cause for parental concern.[2] Television is nearly universal in the United States. The Youth Monitor found that 98.0 percent of households had at least one television set compared to 90.6 percent of households

[1]The 6-17 age range covers a wide range as kids mature. Not all questions were asked of 6-8 year olds. Where age may impact the findings discussed in this paper, the age factor is noted.

[2]See Research Note No. 65 for a detailed discussion of the Youth Monitor findings about the use of television in schools and the impact of viewing on education.

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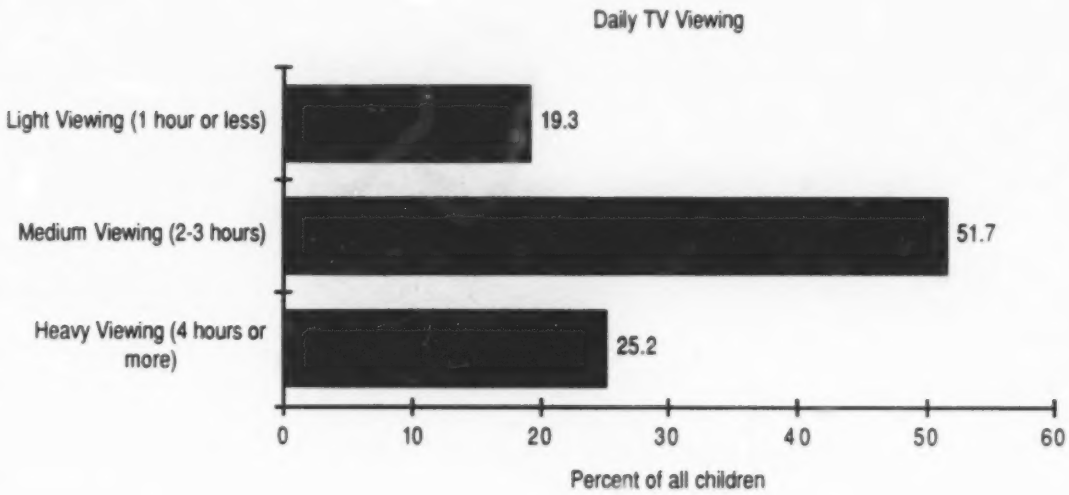
with telephones.[3] Moreover, fifty percent of children with their own rooms have their own television set in their room.

Kids' Viewing Habits

Children watch a lot of television. The Youth Monitor survey, which is consistent with A.C. Nielsen data on viewing, indicates that *kids watch television an average of nearly three hours per weekday and four hours per weekend day adding up to more than 22 hours per week of television viewing.* Less than 20 percent of kids watch an hour or less per day. Viewing habits vary among demographic segments of the population. Across income characteristics television viewing decreases as household income increases. Also, African-American and Hispanic children view even more hours, with Hispanic children reporting approximately 25 hours per week and African-American children viewing approximately 24 hours per week. This finding is consistent with overall viewing patterns of these ethnic groups.



Average Number of Hours Viewed Per Week	
Total Kids	22.15
PBS Viewers	22.15
African-Americans	23.80
Hispanics	25.38
HH Income $50K +	21.91
6-8 year-olds	20.71

[3]This question was asked only of children ages 9-17.

What is the impact of the amount of viewing on their daily lives? When are they viewing and with whom are they viewing television? *Television viewing is the number one activity for children in the hours between school and dinner time.* Nearly 80 percent of all kids report TV viewing as a usual activity then. The percentage dips to 63.1 percent for kids who work more than five hours per week and for kids who are generally light television viewers (defined as viewing one hour or less per day).

Does television viewing prevent kids from pursuing other activities? We asked kids if they felt that they watched too much TV, and if their TV viewing interfered with other activities, like homework, sports, and reading. Interestingly, the group that viewed the most TV (four or more hours per day) was most likely to think they watched too much TV -- more than one-third of the heavy TV viewers agreed that they watched too much television. And over 41 percent of the heavy viewers felt that their TV viewing interfered with other activities (compared to 31.9 percent of all kids in the survey). In fact, fewer heavy viewers reported actually doing after school activities (such as homework, playing outside, chores, after school clubs, and reading) than all kids. In comparison, more of the light viewers reported doing these activities.

Despite the number of children with their own television sets, television viewing is often a family activity. *Nearly half of all kids reported that watching TV during the evening was an activity they usually did with their family.* Families most likely to be viewing together included families in rural areas, and Hispanic families. TV viewing ranked third as a usual family activity out of a list of fifteen items. (Eating dinner was the most often reported family activity, followed by going on vacation.) When specifically asked about viewing at 8 p.m., only 17.6 percent reported viewing alone and 46.2 percent reported viewing with parents. And kids who were identified as public TV viewers, whether or not they were actually viewing public TV at 8 p.m., were even more likely to be viewing with parents (49.4 percent) than kids who don't watch public TV (39.9 percent). Since the PBS viewer group is somewhat younger than the non-viewer group, age differences probably account for a large part of the difference in viewing with parents. The kids who were the least likely to be watching with their parents were the ones with C/D grade averages and the oldest kids.

What kids watch

The Youth Monitor asked kids to name their favorite channel among all channels. Fox was most popular (especially with older kids), and Nickelodeon was favored by the 6-8 year-olds. ABC, MTV, and HBO were the next group of favorites with MTV appealing to the older kids. Disney rated a distant third with the youngest kids behind Nickelodeon and Fox, while PBS came in fourth.

What programs are attracting kids to these channels? Cartoons on Saturdays and after school and situation comedies in the evening are the most appealing programs. A sample of some of the highest-rated programs with a large youth audience follows:

Ratings

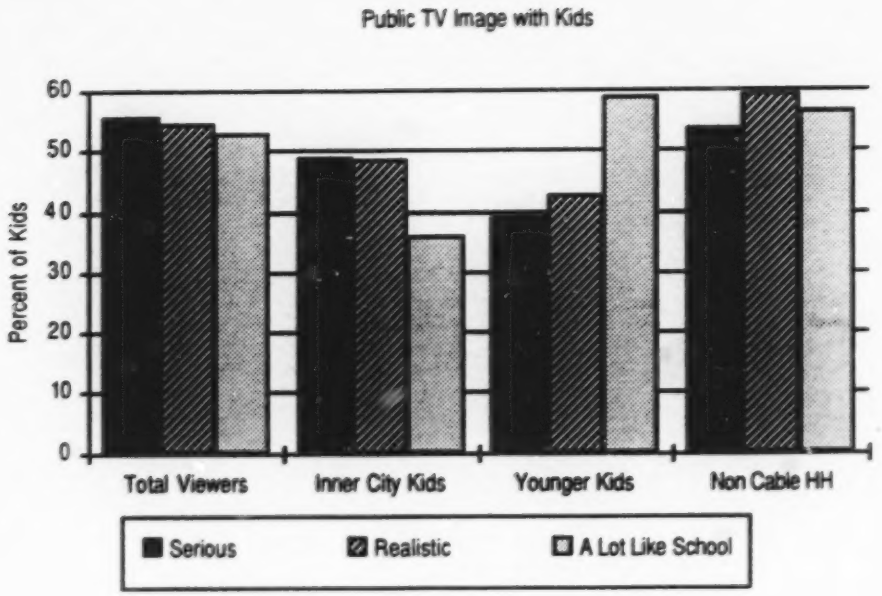
Program	Network	Ages 6-11	Ages 12-17
X-Men	FOX	7.1	7.0
Crash Dummies	FOX	7.7	4.2
Tiny Toons	FOX	5.7	4.0
Simpsons	FOX	15.3	13.0
Roseanne	ABC	11.6	12.6
Martin	FOX	13.0	13.9
Home Improvement	ABC	11.8	13.8
Fresh Prince of Bel Air	NBC	9.2	13.2
Beverly Hills 90210	FOX	8.3	17.2

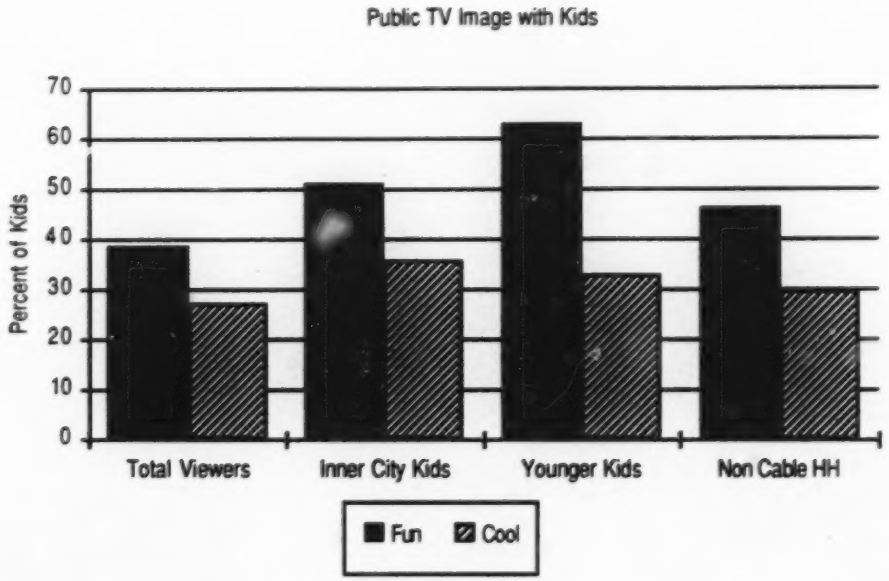
Source: Nielsen Television Index, May 1993

Kids and public television

What do we know about kids who watch public television? And what is the image of public television with kids? Two-thirds of the children in the survey reported viewing public television. The average time spent viewing per week was approximately two hours and twenty minutes, with greater amounts of viewing among younger kids and Hispanic children. PBS viewers closely reflected the demographic characteristics of the total population. Remember that the youngest children in this survey are age 6, so the Youth Monitor misses the target audience for the popular public television preschool series.

Words that were most often chosen to describe pubic television by children were "serious," "realistic" and "a lot like school." While kids were less likely to describe public TV as "fun" and "cool," there were some significant variations in perceptions across demographic groups. Kids in households without cable were more likely to describe the channel as "fun" (46.2 percent compared to 34.6 percent in cable households). Inner city kids were also more likely to describe the channel as "fun" (51.2 percent) and less likely to think of the channel as "a lot like school" (36.0 percent compared to 52.8 percent of the total viewers). Inner city kids were also more likely to think of PBS as "cool." Younger children, ages 6-8 were also more likely to find PBS "fun" and less likely to think of the channel as "serious." The different image among age groups is likely to be a product of the choice of programming: the 6-8 year-olds were more often viewing programs like *Sesame Street.*, while the older children were more often tuned to programs such as *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?* and *National Geographic*.





Parents, kids and television

How are parents responding to their children's use of television? While the data show that parents and kids are often watching television together in the evening, parents have concerns about the quantity and the quality of television viewing. Parents are apparently expressing their concerns about how much television their

children are watching. *More than half of the children in the survey reported that "not watching too much TV" was really important to their parents.* While kids who were PBS viewers thought this was important to their parents more often than the non-PBS viewers, the kids who were hearing this message the most were in families where parents had at least some college education and in Hispanic households. Kids that seemed to be getting this message the least from their parents were the C/D students. (This group of students generally reported a lower percentage in most of the things that were important to parents.)

A current issue for adults is the amount of violence on television and how it may be affecting children. This survey asked kids if they thought there was too much violence on television. *More than two-thirds of the children thought there was too much violence on television.*[4] Among kids who are PBS viewers 69.1 percent think there is too much violence, and among inner city kids the percentage jumps to 74.2 percent. Girls are more likely to think there is too much violence than boys. More than 70 percent of African-American kids think there is too much violence also.

The importance of TV

This study demonstrates the importance of television in kids' lives. Television is in their homes, is often in the kids' own rooms, and is viewed many hours per week. Television is also in the schools, used to enhance learning. Television is kids' number one source of information on news and current events, and a prominent source of information for consumer items and music trends.

Television clearly impacts American children significantly. A large portion of kids' time is spent watching television. Channels like Fox and Nickelodeon are more likely to be recalled by kids over the age of six as their favorites. Although public television has captured the preschool age group with high quality educational programming, older children spend more of their viewing time with other networks. To expand the high quality programs on public television to older kids more public television offerings with an appeal to children over the age of six are needed.

If you have questions about these data, please refer them to Janice Jones at (202) 879-9677. We also welcome any comments and recommendations about how to make the data more useful to you.

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[4]This question was asked only of 9-17 year-olds.